From Methodology of the Mother Tongue to Methodology of Slovak as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: The aim of second language methodology is to control teaching the language which is for minorities a foreign language. If foreign language teaching and learning is to be effective and successful, it needs to be related to a certain agent which functions as a mediator between the subject matter and learners. Teaching – either controlled or not - to minorities with a different mother tongue becomes a subject of interest of bilingualism (or multilingualism), where in the centre of attention various degrees of a mother tongue and second language mastery are.

Key words: Second language methodology, foreign language teaching, bilingualism (or multilingualism).

Introduction

For minorities, staying in a natural foreign language environment means spontaneous uncontrolled learning a target language (second language) – Slovak. Learners are able to absorb their target language through listening to the language which is not their mother tongue without interference of the teacher (or other mediating agent). The object of the Slovak language methodology for minorities living in Slovakia is to control foreign language learning and at the same time to reflect this phenomenon: various degrees of second language mastery in relation to the mastery of their mother tongues. This influence (besides sociometric factors such as age, education, etc.) is due to the stay of minorities in such environment where Slovak as an official language is used actively. Learners are influenced by a foreign language environment but there lacks the impact of the syllabus on language education. Learners do not learn in an effective and complex way without teacher´s controlled (methodological) intervention. This phenomenon is known as "practising prescription" and attracts attention within specifically different language education. Here we can see many faults related to training of Slovak language teachers in a minority environment (the Slovak language is a state language). The discipline such as Slovak language and literature methodology does not deal with (or only to a very small extend) specific needs of students who study at schools where a minority language is the language of instruction (Píšová, 2013, p. 2). The teacher is therefore trained for such kind of education the same methods as the teacher of Slovak as a mother tongue.

The object of methodology of Slovak for minorities is to study various possibilities how to make Slovak language teaching more accessible for minority groups in Slovakia. Gregorík (2014) says that knowledge of mother tongue – in oral and also written form – is one of the students´ key competencies for successful self-realization not only during the studies but also after the studies. Through analyses of the present situation – how the Slovak language is taught to minorities – a study of Slovak language acquisition is being created. The state language is considered to be a second/target language (L_2) and such education should take into consideration social requirements of the target ethnic group. Therefore the target language functions as a tool of communication among the citizens of Slovak nationality. It is important to build on the bilingual or plurilingual (more languages) concept but not from the multilingual concept. The typical feature of the last one is that learners can speak more languages or language knowledge is gained at school or in other educational environment. Typical phenomenon of multilingualism is present at schools where more than one foreign language is offered to study. The concept of plurilingualism (as well as bilingualism) exceeds this frame of language education – here we speak about knowledge of more languages or about co-existing of various languages in a certain society. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) of 2002 assumes that this fact is taken into consideration when educational documents in individual countries of the European Union are created. CEFR emphasises the fact that "as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact"

(CEFR, 2002, p. 4). Such a concept of language and culture teaching is based on a relation between two (or more) languages and builds on a received communicative competence. This principle of language education is dominant also in the area of Slovak language as a foreign language education as well as a second/target language for minorities. The discipline of Slovak language and Slovak literature in this specific environment covers all the elements (grammar, conversation, stylistics, literature) which lead to communicative competence acquisition and to the ability to think in the target language. Language practice shows that this may be a functioning mutual relationship when the learner uses all the knowledge about a language. In comparison to teaching more languages at schools, there is a difference: language knowledge and skills gained in a natural multilingual environment overlap and are not isolated, they may influence each other. In a common performance, there is a spontaneous code switching and language changing, while the speaker fluently uses both languages with the aim to communicate in the most effective and understandable way. Code/language switching is very flexible and effective. Its advantage is also the ability to decode quickly international words. Vocabulary is not a dysfunctional isolated set of words used just for communicative purposes but becomes a practical and applicable communicative tool in a foreign language environment. That is why if there is an international word or a word of a similar format in more languages, the listener can (at least to certain extend) decode a communicative purpose and thus reach a certain degree of communication, even though his language abilities are limited.

Such a premise needs to have specified the description and control of Slovak language teaching to minorities as well as defining lingua-didactics of Slovak for minorities. Similarly, based on general methodology of the Slovak language, it is also necessary to create methodology of the Slovak language for minorities with the background of the theory of methods used within this educational environment. This is how we could eliminate basic conceptual faults in the teacher training programme of the Slovak language in such environment where minority´s language prevails. At present, such methodology is absent and what comes into being is "uniform training of Slovak language and literature teachers – those who are preparing to teach at schools with Slovak language of instructions and those who are going to teach at schools with minority language of instructions" (Píšová, 2014, p. 3). If we were to rely on methodology of foreign languages which is in many aspects very close to methodology of Slovak for minorities it is essential to build on the fact that this science is very practical and most of all applicable and all conceptual documents should be based on this fact.

When creating a concept of methodology of the Slovak language for minorities, it may be based on two different lingua-didactics concepts: methodology of the Slovak language as a mother tongue and as a foreign language – however, their penetration should reflect the needs and specifics of language education. The methodological concept of Slovak as a foreign language takes into consideration sociolinguistic and ethno-cultural specifics that need to be implemented in curricula. The methodological intention of foreign language teaching is reflected in the forms of language education. The aim is very specific and that is why the syllabus is modified to the creation of study materials. This is very similar in case of teaching Slovak through methods of foreign languages in a minority environment. It is also necessary to take into account the needs of language learner training with other language base and a reached level of acquired Slovak language. Methodology of the Slovak language needs to be narrowly specified and determined by an adjective in order to be clear that it is methodology of the Slovak language for minorities living in Slovakia.

Choděra (p. 24) states seven crucial factors (criteria) that identify foreign language methodologies. Those criteria may be applied when differing Slovak language methodology for teaching Slovak in which a minority language participates. According to aiming a target language teaching we differ:

- target language, or a taught language (however, not a language of instructions) – Slovak;
- mother tongue = languages of minorities in Slovakia (Hungarian, Ukrainian, Polish, Czech, Roman, Ruthenian, German, Russian);
- a target language or a mediating language when learning a target one is the Slovak language;
- natural language environment (minority language in a majority language environment);
- characteristics from the point of view of age in educational institutions: children and adolescents, students of primary and secondary schools who pass gradual development of language levels from beginners to intermediate ones;
- the language environment in this type of education may be called multidimensional as education of a minority language runs together with a second (target – Slovak) language.

Language syllabus of a second target language represents only a selected syllabus and a narrowed range of language units of the system which is described by linguistics. This selected set of syllabus is the so called language minimum, however, many authors of foreign language methodologies agree on the fact that it is more appropriate to call it "optimum" (the aim is to educate average students not those who are least language educated). In Slovak language classrooms where the language of instruction is a minority language, the selected optimum is widened – in comparison with foreign language education in multilingual teaching. Such widening is

related to a bilingual environment of students and the syllabus is extended at all language levels. According to that we speak about selected phonetic, grammar, lexical, vocabulary or syntactic minimum or optimum. Those aspects of curriculum cover three parts of language education in the National educational programme within subjects of the Slovak language and Slovak literature. That means that the curriculum (educational programme) is oriented on optimal (average) achievement of language abilities while optimum is clearly highlighted down to minimum – well defined and visibly bounded. Within the lexical part, it tackles vocabulary which is selected as passive and active. Its classification depends on either productive or receptive use of language phenomena in education. It is obvious that the set of passive vocabulary is more extensive because of receptiveness (understanding) of broad-spectrum types of texts during a learning/teaching process. Active vocabulary represents words which are more frequently used and activated and mostly in other types of texts, e.g. in various productive types of exercises. The same it is with grammar optimum/minimum, defined as didactic grammar. These are grammar structures selected out of the language system and its description from the point of view of teacher´s needs and student´s needs. Here we can also see a certain restriction of the grammar range in learning texts in the line from activeness to passiveness. We speak about productive (active) grammar and passive (receptive) grammar. How frequently they are going to be taught depends on curriculum-formal characteristics of language units. A term "lingua-realia" is related to disclosing target language structures. Choděra (2004) defines the term as realia which are closely linked to the language and jointly define what is being referred to and what is marked. In language practice it means learning/teaching a foreign language in comparison with a mother tongue (comparing target language units with native language units – as a tool for better understanding in the process of explanation – with the aim to achieve a certain goal).

Methods of teaching target language units

Methods could be classified as activities that help learners to acquire knowledge or develop their abilities. In a narrow sense, they may be considered tools to educate and make learning/teaching more effective, dynamic and vital. They are of a great priority – educational results depend on the teacher´s choice of a teaching method and the choice depends on certain teaching conditions. In a broad sense, we may consider methods as methodological approaches towards teaching – direct or indirect known also as grammar-translation method. Language education prefers a (direct) communicative method that leads to pragmatic goals of education, functional use of language units related to different communicative needs (thematically presented parts) and moreover concentration on language skills in language practice (tasks and exercises aimed at lexical, morphological and syntactical training). Nowadays, communicative approach has been manifested in activating methods that cover problem solving teaching and teaching through experience and didactic games. Frequently used and most common and preferred ones within Slovak language teaching are: *problem solving teaching* → a creative dialogue (in a closed circle, students speak, react, respond teacher´s motivating questions related to a recently read text); "Six thinking hats" (different attitudes towards a problem – from various perspectives); project method (creating a project means solving issues of a certain topic). *Experiental learning/teaching* (based on learning through a direct experience) → role plays (simulating a certain situation); brainstorming (producing ideas even though they sometimes – in the beginning - seem to be unrelated); "accuse – advocate – judge" (argumentations of people as if on the court); "Cinquain" (a five-verse poem on a certain topic with a defined process of creation – form the point of view of form and content). Opposing those methods, there are non-direct ones: when in a foreign language education a target language is compared to a mother tongue and grammar explanation is present. The result is the prime achievement of a language competence which does not always need to be a communicative competence (especially when foreign language acquisition). " ...to be communicatively competent does not cover only accurate and grammatically, stylistically and lexically correct expressions – moreover, the use of other devices is important, such as non-verbal communication (mimics, gestures, body language, haptics), distinction between formal and informal language according to a setting in which a conversation is carried out, according to participants of the conversation, or the topic/content of communication. It is essential to distinguish between oral and written discourse and keep in mind many other elements in various interactive situations. Here we also count the ability to pass information and express it with the use of graphs, symbols (numbers, musical notes), pictures and drawings; ability to communicate through information technologies, to present information, explain and clarify it in an understandable way; ability to listen actively; to read with comprehension and the skill to process facts/information" (Smetanová, 2012, p. 98).

The border between direct and indirect methods is not clear and is mostly defined by frequency of a preferred symbol according to Hellmich´s bipolarity of couples (1968) of methods direct and indirect. For instance, in a direct method there is a preference of a sentence to a word. Also it is preferred a situation, function and intention to the system (strauctures), speech to language and syntagmatics and paradigmatics, synthesis to analysis, induction to deduction, a spoken language to a written one, avoiding translation and comparison with mother tongue. Other preferences are: working with texts, practice (pragmatically oriented teaching) to the theory, content to form. Such bipolarity does not exclude preferences of direct methods in second language education,

on the contrary, it confirms the need and necessity of existence and application of both of the methods in the educational process. Such a compromise could be a mix of the methods that ingrates both parts of direct and indirect methods: communicative-functional and situational-thematic parts and at the same time a part of system-structure. The parts of direct method prevail also in mixed methods.

The aim of training teachers of the Slovak language and Slovak literature with a minority language of instruction is to show the bipolarity of preferred symbols and signs within a certain teaching method and the uniqueness of a current pedagogical-methodological situation. The selection of a method must be modified to the content, students, teachers (and their experience) and last but not least to teaching aids and technology that the teacher has to their disposal as well as to the form of teaching because without a carefully chosen and used teaching method the teacher cannot achieve the goals that are set (Hincová – Húsková, 2011, p. 25).

The possibilities to learn languages have contributed and visibly changed and developed advance information-communication technologies. We may speak about the so called digital books and e-learning/teaching. These forms support an idea of language education: to be able to learn a language in a flexible and effective way, to gain a communicative competence to react when in interaction with others. ICT are essential when teaching Slovak, however only when their implementing is not purposeless and that the teacher respects the requirement of certain extend and balance when choosing methodological processes (Luptáková, 2013, p. 3; source: http://www.jazyk-literatura-komunikace.cz/index.php/2-2013/category/23-clanky). Another method is connected with the usage of ICT in language education – audio-oral or audio-lingual method. This one prefers listening to oral performances in order to gain new communicative habits through presented language sources. Most often the teacher – who acts as a native speaker – becomes a model, however, other technologies, such as CDs are used as well – those are parts of textbooks for schools with minority language of instruction. The aim of such oral performances is to help students understand texts that are not spoken by their teacher.

Application of teaching methods when teaching Slovak as a mother tongue or as a second language is crucial. Those methods are modified and changed according to growing requirements and needs of learners when acquiring the language. This is the reason why Slovak language and literature teacher training becomes uniform – those who are going to teach at schools with Slovak language of instruction and those who are trained to be teachers at schools with minority language of instruction. As those languages are very specific and typologically different from Slovak, it is necessary to take a completely different approach to creation of school curricula that cover basic goals and structures of selected syllabuses. These documents also serve as a base for textbooks and methodological guides for teachers who apply and use them in the educational process. When creating didactic tools and aids, partly principles for creating textbooks for foreign language education and generally principles for managing foreign language education are used. Those meet the requirements to reach the goal of foreign language education: to be able to use a target language in various language environments – it means to gain a communicative competence. That is why methods which support oral communication are preferred which leads to weaken formal grammar and do not prefer isolated written translations into a mother tongue. The direct method is the centre of teachers´ attention – focused on communication – to grammar-translation method focused on form and structure. When Slovak is taught to foreigners, a modification of the direct Berlitz method is used, the one which has a system of ready-prepared communicative models of acquisition, grammar knowledge is not a direct part of teaching, rules are acquired based on imitation (Pekarovičová, 2004). Because this type of language education is very specific – the target language is a majority group language, learners are those whose mother tongue is a minority language and their levels of the target language differ from one to another – the most natural and effective method we suggest is the mixed (eclectic) method. It consists of the direct communicative method and grammar-translating method based on grammar rules explanation and acquisition of grammar structure through reading and translating texts in a target language and analysis of language phenomena that are present in the texts. Learners gain a grammar competence. In a communicative direct method, work with various types of texts is preferred – and those ones become topical for discussions and dialogues. Through role plays and imitating/simulating various communicative situations learners acquire the language and gain a communicative competence. As this is a mixed method, grammar structures in presented texts play their key roles. Textbooks for secondary schools are designed isolated in three separate/individual blocks: conversation – grammar – composition writing. They assume that secondary schools minority students already have a certain level of the target language. When textbooks are created, mother tongue methodology as well as a foreign language methodology uses the inductive-deductive approach and grammar phenomena are applied in basic texts. The authors of the textbook "Slovo za slovom" (translated: "Word by word") Tibenská and Zatkalíková (2007) have applied a specific way of processing individual topics and units. Their textbook focuses on Slovak as a target language and it is based on mutual linking of lexical and grammar elements and on their development and fixing through the method of gradual steps (confirmation of gained knowledge and adding new one as a spiral). In the beginning, learners are aware of a communicative purpose of the text, later they acquire model communicative situations in interactive exercises. Only after that they are aware of individual language phenomena applied and used in the texts and could practise them in their own language structures or

full texts or in grammar focussed exercise and tasks.

Conclusion

Because of a specific form of the Slovak language, it is necessary to devote a special attention to morphology when teaching Slovak to foreigners. Many pedagogical research and studies show deficiencies in creating grammar structures in language practice but also insufficiencies to use vocabulary appropriately to a communicative situation and incorrect sentences from stylistic and formal points of views. This reflects the fact that teachers – mediators of foreign language education – do not have enough experience with teaching Slovak using foreign language teaching methods. It is also because of the fact that teachers have many times problems to explain a language issue in the Slovak (target) language and use their mother tongue (language of their students) instead. However, this kind of code switching does not correspond with requirements connected with a target language acquisition. It is because languages (taught and learnt) are typologically and genealogically different and very specific. That is why it is necessary to process and create methodology of the Slovak language and Slovak literature with minority language of instruction that would serve as a subject of applied linguistics. Here, the need to teacher training will be highlighted – especially through methods of foreign language teaching. The principle of forms and working methods application, typical for foreign language education, is not the only postulate when teaching Slovak as a second language. The change should be related to making the whole educational process more effective – regarding goals, methods and forms of teaching and their usage in language education.

Minority languages in Slovakia could be arranged into two categories according to typology of languages: in Slavic languages (Czech, Ukrainian, Ruthenian, Polish and Russian) and non-Slavic languages (Hungarian, German, Roman). The Slavic languages have inflections in their grammar forms, on the contrary the Hungarian language (which is mostly spread in Slovakia) does not inflect at all and that is why this phenomenon is absolutely new for Hungarian learners of Slovak. This is the reason we ask to strengthen a formal-grammar approach not only in textbooks but also generally in the teaching process. Exercises focus on determining, selection or creation of a grammar structure. After communicative-grammar knowledge acquisition learners learn general knowledge (in the process of deduction). This step is strengthen in textbooks for primary schools through the final (formal-grammar) text called "Čo ja viem" (translated: "What I know"). Here are rules, principles and definitions of language terminology formulated. Without such formulations, learners would not be able to create (analogically) texts necessary for language practice. Or perhaps their texts would be incorrect and communicatively non-functional. That is why the presence of a mediator in the language education is crucial and a natural bilingual environment is not sufficient.

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